

3.3.1 Natural Communities

This section of the document discusses natural communities of concern. The focus of this section is on biological communities, not individual plant or animal species. This section also includes information on wildlife corridors and habitat fragmentation. Wildlife corridors are areas of habitat used by wildlife for seasonal or daily migration. Habitat fragmentation involves the potential for dividing sensitive habitat and thereby lessening its biological value.

Habitat areas that have been designated as critical habitat under the Federal Endangered Species Act (FESA) are discussed below in Section 3.3.5, Threatened and Endangered Species. Wetlands and other waters are discussed below in Section 3.3.2, Wetlands and Other Waters.

3.3.1.1 Affected Environment

The BSA is comprised predominantly of heavily human-influenced and altered habitats associated with roadways, residential, public, and commercial developments. No high-quality native habitats occur within the BSA. Vegetated lands within the BSA are limited to ornamental landscaping on developed lands, agricultural fields, and flood-control facilities. Due to the presence of vehicular traffic and other public/private infrastructure, the BSA is consistently exposed to trash, debris, noise, light, dust, emissions, and roadway maintenance activities. As a result, plant and wildlife species present within the BSA are assumed to be acclimated/adapted to frequent human disturbance.

No regional wildlife migration corridors are known to occur within the BSA (South Coast Wildlands 2008), and any historic regional corridors that may have been present have since been modified. Although specific regional wildlife corridors do not occur within the BSA, constructed flood-control facilities and channels may provide limited localized linkages between isolated native habitat patches beyond the BSA. These include the San Gabriel River and Santa Ana River, which are both concrete-lined upstream and downstream of the BSA. Wildlife usage within these channels is limited to commonly occurring birds, mammals, reptiles, fish, and amphibians, which are assumed to have developed a tolerance to constructed roadways and routine maintenance activities.

Natural Communities of Special Concern

The BSA does not contain designated USFWS critical habitat or any identified regional wildlife corridors. As stated above, no known regional wildlife migration corridors are known to occur within the BSA, and any historic corridors that may have been historically present have since been modified as a result of private and public development.

Habitats are considered to be of special concern based on (1) federal, State, or local laws regulating their development; (2) limited distributions; and/or (3) the habitat requirements of special-status plants or animals occurring on site. The BSA includes four vegetation/land cover types, which include Agriculture, Developed, Riparian, and Channel. Only the Riparian community may be considered a Natural Community of Special Concern. The riparian community occurs within limited portions of the BSA and consists of native riparian habitat that has been heavily impacted by invasive, nonnative species.

The typical association of these riparian habitat types with drainages means that they are “protected” under the Fish and Game Code and, to a certain extent, wetlands in the riparian area are jurisdictional under the CWA. These habitats are considered wildlife habitat because they provide protective cover, water, and food for a variety of species. Many animal species are riparian habitat obligates. Other animals, including large mammals, require access to water and use bands of riparian habitat as wildlife corridors. As such, California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) regulates riparian areas only to the extent that those areas are associated with the banks of a stream or lake shorelines.

Vegetation Communities

Four vegetation communities were identified within the BSA. Table 3.3.1-1 lists the acreages of each of the vegetation communities observed within the BSA. Descriptions of each community are provided below.

Table 3.3.1-1: Vegetation Communities/Land Cover Occurring in the BSA

Vegetation Community/Land Cover Type	Total Acres
Agriculture	35.6
Developed	2,529.4
Riparian	1.7
Drainage	72.1
Total	2,638.8

Agriculture

This community includes vegetation found on agricultural lands subject to fruit farming (e.g., strawberries). Agricultural lands are limited to two locations: (1) the northern portion of the BSA, south of I-405 on NAVWPNSTA Seal Beach lands between Seal Beach Boulevard and Bolsa Chica Road, and (2) in the southern portion of the BSA north of I-405, between Harbor

Boulevard and Fairview Road. Although not a Natural Community, agricultural lands may provide foraging and breeding habitat for various wildlife species.

Developed

Developed areas occur throughout the BSA and include ditches, roadways, parking lots, vacant lots, residences, commercial buildings, and other private/public infrastructure. No high-quality native habitats exist within these developed areas. Developed areas often contain ornamental plantings, most of which are nonnative species. Although not a Natural Community, developed areas dominate the BSA and may provide foraging and breeding habitat for various wildlife species.

Riparian

As mentioned above, the riparian community occurs within limited portions of the BSA and consists of native riparian habitat that has been heavily impacted by invasive, nonnative species or disturbed by human activities (e.g., trash). The low quality riparian habitat is limited to the banks of the San Gabriel River.

Drainage

Drainages occur throughout the entire BSA and consist of concrete-lined, rock riprap, and/or earthen channels. Many of these channels contain a combination of concrete/rock/earth lining. Vegetation within these channels is either absent or considered to be highly variable from year to year depending on the frequency and volume of storm flows that may scour some or all of the vegetation from within the channel. Although not considered a Natural Community, drainage features may provide foraging habitat for various wildlife species. The regulatory status of affected drainages associated with USACE, CDFW, and RWQCB are discussed in Section 3.3.2.

3.3.1.2 Environmental Consequences

Permanent Impacts

No Build Alternative

The No Build Alternative proposes no construction or other disturbance in the project area; therefore, the No Build Alternative would result in no permanent impacts related to natural communities.

Build Alternatives

Vegetation communities that would be permanently impacted within the BSA include Developed and Drainage vegetated communities. The permanently affected vegetation communities

associated with each build alternative are summarized in Table 3.3.1-2 and are shown on the Figures in Appendix O2 – O4.

Table 3.3.1-2: Permanent Impacts to Vegetation Communities by Alternative

Vegetation Community	Permanent Impact Area (Acres)		
	Alternative 1	Alternative 2	Alternative 3
Agriculture	0.0	0.0	0.0
Developed	79.3	91.3	101.2
Riparian	0.0	0.0	0.0
Drainage	1.6	1.9	2
Total	80.9	93.2	103.2

Temporary Impacts

No Build Alternative

The No Build Alternative proposes no construction or other disturbance in the project area; therefore, the No Build Alternative would result in no temporary impacts related to natural communities.

Build Alternatives

Vegetation communities that would be temporarily impacted within the BSA include Developed and Drainage vegetated communities. The temporary affected vegetation communities associated with each build alternative are summarized in Table 3.3.1-3 and are shown in the Figures in Appendix O2 through O4.

Table 3.3.1-3: Temporary Impacts to Vegetation Communities by Alternative

Vegetation Community	Temporary Impact Area (Acres)		
	Alternative 1	Alternative 2	Alternative 3
Agriculture	0.0	0.0	0.0
Developed	189.1	179.7	202.1
Riparian	0.0	0.0	0.0
Drainage	5.7	5.6	6.8
Total	194.8	185.3	208.9

3.3.1.3 Avoidance, Minimization, and/or Mitigation Measures

The project is not anticipated to permanently or temporarily affect natural communities of special concern, more specifically the Riparian community; however, the following avoidance and minimization measure is proposed:

BIO-1 Prior to clearing or construction, highly visible barriers (e.g., orange construction fencing) will be installed around riparian/riverine vegetation adjacent to the project footprint to designate Environmentally Sensitive Areas (ESA) to be preserved. No grading or fill activity of any type will be permitted within these ESAs. In addition, heavy equipment, including motor vehicles, will not be allowed to operate within the ESAs. All construction equipment will be operated in a manner to prevent accidental damage to nearby preserved areas. No structure of any kind, or incidental storage of equipment or supplies, will be allowed within these protected zones. Silt fence barriers will be installed at the ESA boundary to prevent accidental deposition of fill material in areas where vegetation is immediately adjacent to planned grading activities.

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